(b) the total number of post offices and employees in postal department in the country alongwith the number of extra-department employees; and

(c) the details of the plan being worked on by Government to make postal department competitive and effective detailing the new measures that Government have been taking?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) No, Sir. The Department of Posts is providing various mail, financial and retail services through its network of more than 1,55,000 post offices in the length and breadth of the country. Even in the era of information technology, the mail market is expanding specially in business to business and business to consumer segments. The Department of Posts has also taken advantage of information technology for introducing e-enabled services and improving quality of services.

(b) Total number of Post Offices in the country, as on 31.03.2006 is 155333. The total number of employees as on 31.03.2006 is 5,20,191 including, 286,004 extra-departmental employees now Gramin Dak Sewaks.

(c) The Department's proposals for the 11th Five Year Plan (2007-12) are under consideration of the Planning Commission and are yet to be finalized. The proposals will enable the department to capitalize on its strengths, utilize the market opportunities and face challenges such as competition with private operators. Since this can be done only by improving services and adapting them to the needs of a rapidly evolving and increasing technology-driven world, the main focus of the plan is on computerization of financial and non-financial activities; and further development of information technology-based services that can garner substantial revenues.

Gross telephone subscribers

4604. SHRIMATI SUPRIYA SULE: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether gross telephone subscribers in the country reached 196.71 million in January, 2007 as compared to 189.93 million in December, 2006;

(b) if so, whether the overall tele-density reached 17.45 in January, 2007 as compared to 17.16 at the end of December, 2006;

(c) if so, the target set for 2007-08; and

(d) whether all the villages would be fully covered under this scheme?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) Yes, Sir. Gross telephone subscribers in the country reached 196.71 (million in January, 2007) as compared to 189.92 million in December, 2006.

(b) Yes, Sir. The overall tele-denisty reached 17.45% in January, 2007 as compared to 16.83% at the end of December, 2006.

(c) There is no specific target set for tele-density for the year 2007-08. However, the target set was to achieve a tele-density of 7% by the year 2005 and 15% by the year 2010, which had already been achieved. Also there is a taget of 250 million telephones by the end of December, 2007 and 500 million telephones by the end of year 2010.

(d) Out of total 607491 villages in the country, 552824 villages have been provided VPT (Village Public Telephone) facility as on 31-03-2007. BSNL (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited) has entered into an agreement with USOF (Universal Service Obligation Fund), DOT in November, 2004, for providing VPTs (Village public Telephones) facility to 66822 accessible, undisputed and undisturbed uncovered villages having population more than 100 as per census 1991, which are planned to be provided with VPT facility progressively by November, 2007 in accordance with the terms and conditions of the said agreement. Out of the awarded village, BSNL has provided VPT facility to 46969 villages up to 31-03-2007.

Also, a scheme is being launched by Government of India to provide subsidy support for the provision of mobile services, including WLL services, in specified rural and remote areas, where there is no existing fixed or mobile services and is likely to be made operational by June, 2008. About 2.12 lakh villages are likely to be covered under this scheme.